

Key findings

Identity, integration and inclusion have been at the forefront of public policy debates throughout 2014. The Scottish independence referendum, on-going rows about the implications of immigration, and the rise of the UK Independence Party have made us think more deeply about the UK's boundaries, where decision making about its laws should lie and who should be allowed to come and live here. This summary considers what Britain feels about itself – its boundaries, its identity, and its inhabitants – and the clues this gives us about Britain and its future.

Becoming British?

The threshold to being considered 'British' has got higher over time. Most people see Britishness as determined by a mix of factors, some which can be acquired over time and others which are largely determined early on in life.

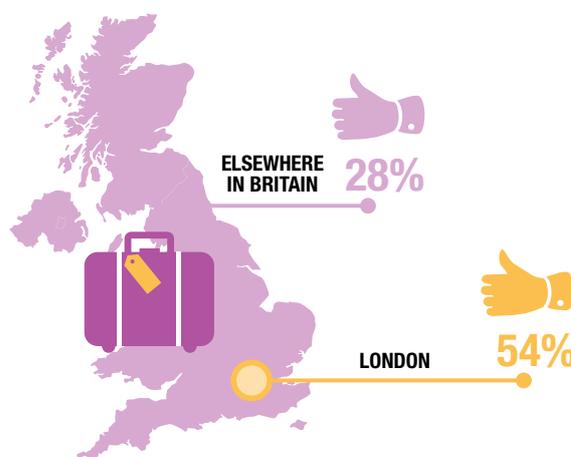
Almost everyone (95%) thinks that to be 'truly British' you have to speak English, up from 85% in 1995. 77% think a person has to have lived in Britain for most of his or her life, up from 71% in 1995.



Immigration

A large majority would like to see immigration levels reduced, but this masks considerable diversity of opinion about the impact it has had on Britain's economy and culture.

Londoners and graduates are among the most likely to think immigration has a positive impact on Britain's economy. 54% of Londoners take this view, compared with 28% elsewhere in Britain. So do 60% of graduates, compared with 17% of those with no qualifications.



A United Kingdom?

Within the next few months Scotland will decide whether it should remain in or leave the United Kingdom. Public opinion across Great Britain will not raise insurmountable barriers to putting either outcome into practice.

86% of people in Scotland would like to be able to carry on watching the BBC after independence, while 82% of those in England and Wales think they 'definitely' or 'probably' should be allowed to do so.



Britain 2014

Identity, integration and inclusion have been at the forefront of public policy debates throughout 2014. The Scottish independence referendum, on-going rows about the implications of immigration, and the rise of the UK Independence Party on an anti-European Union (EU) ticket have made us think more deeply about the UK's boundaries, where decision making about its laws should lie and who should be allowed to come and live here. Meanwhile, few weeks go by without discussion about whether and how Britain should 'protect' itself from the outside world, for example in relation to the role of foreign-owned firms in Britain's energy market or the impact of foreign ownership on London's housing market.

In a few years' time the UK as it currently exists could look very different. A Yes vote in Scotland in September will see Scotland leave the UK by March 2016, according to the Scottish Government's ideal timetable at least. And if the Conservative Party wins a majority at the 2015 General Election, an in-out referendum on the UK's membership of the EU will follow by the end of 2017. A Yes at both referendums will mean a future Britain that looks very different to Britain today.

In this summary we pull together key strands from the six chapters included in the 31st British Social Attitudes report to consider what Britain feels about itself – its boundaries, its identity, and its inhabitants. These raise important questions; people's social identities, especially their national identity (or identities), are often thought to matter for both political legitimacy and social cohesion. People's willingness to accept the right of a government to govern depends on their feeling that it represents and symbolizes the 'nation' to which they feel a sense of belonging. Their willingness to share social risks, for example via a common form of welfare, depends on a shared sense that they belong to the same (imagined) community. And people's willingness to accept the right of others to come and live within their country depends on the degree to which migrants are regarded as 'us' rather than 'other', opening up the question of what features people think matter when defining who they think belongs.

Being British?

A shared sense of Britishness is often seen as the glue that helps keep the UK together. But it coexists with other 'national' identities; Scottish, English, Irish, Northern Irish and Welsh. In England (and outside the UK) the terms 'English' and 'British' are often seen as synonymous – leading to their being called a distinction without a difference (Cohen, 1995; Kumar, 2003). But there is some evidence that devolution elsewhere in the UK has sharpened people's appreciation of these differences, and led to an increase in the proportion of people in England who choose to describe themselves as English (Curtice, 2013). In 1992, 31 per cent described themselves as "English" when asked to choose which national identity best described them, now 41 per cent do so (47 per cent describe themselves as British, down from 63 per cent in 1992). However, this shift took place in the late 1990s, during the advent of devolution elsewhere in the UK; since then there has been little change.

There is no doubt that a sense of being Scottish is more widespread and deeply held north of the border than are any feelings of Britishness. In 2013, only one in ten people say that they are either "British, not Scottish" or "More British than Scottish". In contrast as many as a quarter (25 per cent) say they



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are Scottish and not British at all. That leaves a majority (62 per cent) however who acknowledge some combination of both identities. For many then, their sense of being Scottish sits alongside a complementary sense of being British rather than in opposition to it.

So that is how people in England and Scotland would describe their own identity.[1] But what do they think matters when it comes to whether someone can be considered British? We first tackled this topic in 1995 by asking how important a range of different attributes were for a person being “truly British”. Now, as then, most people see Britishness as being determined by a mix of factors, some of which can be acquired over time, such as speaking English (seen as important by a near unanimous 95 per cent), respecting Britain’s laws and institutions or having British citizenship (the latter two both being chosen as important by 85 per cent). Others are largely determined early on in life and far harder to acquire (such as being born in Britain, chosen as important by 74 per cent). Earlier this year Sajid Javid MP, the UK’s first Asian secretary of state, was quoted as saying that migrants to the UK should learn English and respect Britain’s way of life; our findings suggest most see these as being fundamental aspects of being British.[2]

As our **National identity** chapter describes, a key finding is that the threshold to being considered British has got higher over time. The proportion who think being able to speak English is important has gone up by ten percentage points, from 85 per cent in 1995 to 95 per cent now. And whereas in 1995, 71 per cent thought having lived one’s life in Britain was important; now 77 per cent think this matters. But despite Prime Minister David Cameron’s assertions that the UK is a “Christian country”, [3] being Christian is only seen as an important element of Britishness by a minority, and a shrinking one at that – down from 32 per cent in 1995 to 24 per cent now. This no doubt reflects the wider decline in religious belonging in the UK over the period (Park and Rhead, 2013).

Beliefs about immigrants

Discussions about what it is to be British and immigration often go hand in hand. In our **Immigration** chapter we dig beneath the surface of public opposition to tease out the perceptions that people have of migrants and the impact they have on Britain. It shows that there is considerable diversity of opinion about the impact that immigration has had on Britain’s economy and culture, with the most economically and socially advantaged being far more positive than other groups. So, while 60 per cent of graduates think immigration has been good for Britain’s economy (overall 31 per cent think this), this is true of only 17 per cent of those with no qualifications. Echoing the recent divide between London and the rest of Britain when it came to support for the UK Independence Party in the elections to the European Parliament in May 2014, London also stands out in its views on immigration. Over half (54 per cent) of Londoners think immigration has been beneficial for Britain’s economy, nearly double the figure (28 per cent) found elsewhere in Britain.

Different sections of the population have very different mental pictures of migrants and the reasons they come to Britain. A quarter (24 per cent) put claiming benefits ahead of studying, working or asylum as the main attraction for new migrants, a view which is particularly strongly held among those who most disapprove of immigration. This perhaps helps explain the fact that 61 per cent think immigrants from the European Union should wait three years or more to be able to claim benefits – 83 per cent say they should wait for one year

or more. In reality, a minimum earnings threshold came into force earlier this year which requires European migrants in the UK to show they are earning at least £149 a week for three months before they can access a range of benefits, demonstrating a considerable gap between public opinion and reality. Concern about access to benefits perhaps underpin the fact that, while in 2003 40 per cent thought legal immigrants should have the same rights as British citizens, just 27 per cent think the same now.

As our **National identity** chapter shows, there is a close link between people's views about immigration and what they think matters when it comes to being "truly British". Those who emphasise a mix of civic factors (like speaking English) and ethnic ones (like being born in Britain) are far more likely to oppose immigration than those who think only civic factors matter.

Issues such as immigration cause huge headaches for politicians, not least because party supporters are so divided on the issue. Any policy which satisfies those on one side of the debate will tend to infuriate those on the other. In the case of immigration, it is also evident that politicians and policy makers tend to be drawn heavily from the more socially advantaged and highly educated end of the spectrum, creating a potential for disconnect and distrust between a more liberal political class which accepts immigration and an electorate among whom many find it intensely threatening.

Political legitimacy

People's sense of pride in being British has fallen – from the 43 per cent in 2003 who said they were "very proud" to 35 per cent now (Young, 2014). This change has taken place across much of British society and it is only those who were the most fiercely proud in 2003, the over 65s and the least well educated, whose views remain unchanged.

Perhaps this is not surprising. After all, many of Britain's most important institutions have been under pressure in recent times. As we reported last year (Lee and Young, 2013), public levels of trust in government have declined over the last 30 years. In 2013, a third (32 per cent) say that they "almost never" trust "British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party", three times as many as took this view in 1986 (11 per cent). At the same time, the proportion who trust government "just about always" or "most of the time" has more than halved (17 per cent in 2013, down from 38 per cent in 1986). Politics and politicians are not alone in having seen their reputations harmed. Banks and bankers have suffered even more, as has the press (Park et al., 2013).

Given this, how do people think that the UK should best be governed? As our **Independence referendum** chapter discusses, the decision Scotland is due to make in September 2014 will partly be about Scottish people's sense of national identity. But the practical consequences of independence, and particularly the perceived economic consequences of leaving or staying in the UK, will also play an important role in people's thinking when it comes to choosing whether to vote Yes or No. This suggests that whichever way Scotland eventually votes, the outcome should be interpreted with caution. The victors are likely to claim either that Scotland has shown its commitment to the future of the Union (by voting No), or has proven that it wants to govern itself just like any other nation does (by voting Yes). But the reality is likely to be rather more prosaic – that the outcome represents voters' best judgment as to which way prosperity appears



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to lie. Meanwhile, there is little appetite in England for it having devolution itself; only one in three would like either an English Parliament (19 per cent) or an assembly in each English region (15 per cent), and these figures are almost the same as they were as long ago as when the Scottish Parliament was first established in 1999 (Curtice, 2014).

The recent success of the UK Independence Party is a reminder of the considerable opposition to the EU that exists across much of the UK. As our **National identity** chapter shows, overall just one in four (21 per cent) think that Britain benefits from EU membership, while just six per cent think that the EU should have more power than the national governments of its member states. As with immigration, there is a close link between people's views about the EU and what they think matters when it comes to being "truly British". Those who emphasise a mix of civic factors (like speaking English) and ethnic ones (like being born in Britain) are far more likely to be Eurosceptics than those who think only civic factors matter.

Our **Democracy** chapter considers how well people think the political system in Britain delivers on what they think matters most. People clearly have high expectations, with a broad consensus among the British public that democracy, in addition to guaranteeing free and fair competitive elections and protecting civil liberties, should also protect people against poverty and involve citizens in decision-making. But, when it comes to the extent to which the British political system delivers, a sizeable minority perceive there to be a democratic deficit. Almost one in five (18 per cent) think that it is extremely important in a democracy for the courts to treat everyone equally but think this does not happen sufficiently in Britain. And a quarter (24 per cent) are dissatisfied with how well the government engages with the public.

Although over a half (56 per cent) of people think that "the creation of the welfare state is one of Britain's proudest achievements", there has been a long-term decline in levels of support for benefit claiming. As our **Welfare** chapter shows, over half of the British public agree with the statement "around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one" (54 per cent) and that "benefits for unemployed people are too high and discourage them from finding paid work" (57 per cent). Despite this, however, when told how much money someone living on a specific benefit would receive, many feel they do not provide enough to live on and would like to see more spending on particular types of claimant.

A future Britain

So what might the future hold? A crucial decision will take place on 18th September 2014, when Scotland votes on whether or not it should leave the United Kingdom. If Scotland votes No, there is little to suggest it will not be able to reach a constitutional agreement that is acceptable both north and south of the border. As our **Scotland** chapter shows, while it is true that public opinion in England would like to stop Scottish MPs from voting on English laws, most people in Scotland would not appear to mind this change very much either. Nor does Scotland's share of public spending seem to be a point of serious contention between the two publics. A non-independent Scotland would, in principle, like to see its devolved institutions have more responsibility for taxation and welfare, but there is little sign that many in England and Wales would oppose this. In fact, there is actually a considerable lack of enthusiasm

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among the Scottish public to see greater devolution translate into major policy differences between Scotland and its neighbours. For instance, only 37 per cent in Scotland, and 28 per cent in England, think it would be OK if the value of the old age pension differed north and south of the border.

Even if Scotland does vote Yes, it will still need to work with the rest of the UK to agree the terms of its divorce and whether and how best to collaborate in the future. This appears perfectly possible. People in England and Wales are broadly happy for Scotland to keep the same King or Queen as them (65 per cent think this should be allowed) while only 13 per cent oppose the idea of Scots being allowed access to the BBC as now. No sign here that public opinion in England and Wales will be a barrier to continuing collaboration on these matters (about both of which the majority of Scots are in favour). But there is potential for disagreement when it comes to whether people in Scotland should be allowed to retain their existing British citizenship (as desired by the Scottish Government) while claiming a new Scottish one. This is not because the two publics take a different view on the subject but because both are apparently rather suspicious of allowing people to carry more than one passport. In England and Wales, a third (33 per cent) think that citizens of a newly independent Scotland should be able to have a British and a Scottish passport; in Scotland, just under a half (47 per cent) agree.

These findings suggest that, whatever the referendum result in September may be, public opinion across Great Britain will not raise insurmountable barriers to putting it into practice. What is harder to assess, however, is the likely direction of travel when it comes to some of the wider issues raised in this summary. This partly reflects the fact that changing attitudes often reflect a number of different pressures. One is the longer term and gradual change caused either by demographic shifts (such as the growing proportion of graduates or an ageing population) or the impact of generational differences (whereby younger generations have very different views, which change little as they get older, to the generations which preceded them). Were these sorts of pressure all that mattered, we might expect to see a future Britain that was more open about who it considered to be British and welcoming to those who seek to move here. But of course other factors shape public opinion too, including heated debates about issues such as immigration numbers and the relationship between the UK and the EU, as well as the impact of specific events such as 9/11, the Olympic Games in 2012 and, as we may perhaps find, the outcome of the independence referendum in Scotland this September. Events and debates like these are also likely to affect public attitudes towards identity, governance and belonging. Might a Yes vote in Scotland in September rekindle debates in England about how it should best be governed or spark further change in the way in which the English think about their own national identity? How will attitudes to immigration change, given the pressure on other parties caused by the UK Independence Party's recent success? And what impact will these and other events have on what people think matters when it comes to being British? We look forward to returning to these and other questions in future editions of this report.



People in England and Wales are broadly happy for Scotland to keep the same King or Queen as them

Notes

1. Unfortunately it is not possible to include analysis of national identity in Wales because surveys using a comparable methodology have not been conducted there since 2007. For information on the surveys that have been conducted since then and the trends in respect of national identity and constitutional preference they suggest have occurred see Curtice (2013), and Wyn Jones and Scully (2012).
2. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-27459468.
3. See www.gov.uk/government/speeches/easter-reception-at-downing-street-2014.

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